

Academic and Career Expressway (ACE)

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 Innovative Strategies in Community Colleges for Working Adults and Displaced Workers

Abstract

Piedmont Virginia Community College's FIPSE project, Academic and Career Expressway (ACE), focuses on the foundational stage of intake, pre-enrollment advising, and pre-college/pre-workforce readiness for developing and demonstrating a model that prepares displaced workers and other adults for success in postsecondary education and the workplace. This focus is important because most new jobs in the U.S. now require postsecondary training while research has shown that a significant percentage of adult students entering postsecondary education are not ready for college-level work and do not persist to completion of pre-college developmental courses. High unemployment during the Great Recession exacerbated the problem.

The premise of the ACE model is that if the College can provide the calibrated developmental education intervention to take the low-skilled adult worker who lacks a college education and is not college-ready and raise him or her to the threshold of readiness for college work, then he or she will be sufficiently empowered to successfully tackle the remainder of the postsecondary course of study needed for success in the workplace. ACE serves a diverse group of adults and displaced workers drawn from the urban, suburban, and rural demography in the College's service area that encompasses Charlottesville, Virginia, and six surrounding counties. Virtually all of the applicants accepted into the ACE program are academically at-risk students.

ACE strategies include providing intrusive pre-enrollment advising followed by hands-on academic coaching in the ACE Success Center. ACE offers a student-centered approach in a developmental class with individualized learning modules, competency-based progression, self-pacing, and self-scheduling within an open-access, extended evening and weekend operating schedule. The Center is staffed by a program coordinator and academic coaches who screen students to determine course content matched to individual skill needs and provide intensive coaching to help each student successfully engage and complete the program.

As the project concluded in March 2013, major activities in the scope of work were completed. For example, assessment tools that determine the appropriate curriculum modular concepts for individualized student learning have been adopted and applied. A set of screening measures that determines a student's likelihood of completing their curriculum in a self-paced learning environment were implemented. A contextualized curriculum that allows students to enhance needed skills in specific areas was implemented. A flexible yet closely monitored learning environment with academic coaches who assist students in successful completion of their workforce readiness training was created in the first project year.

ACE developmental program completers enrolled in 251 college-level courses, which they completed at an 88 percent pass rate.

Complicating the project progression was the recent initiative sponsored by the Virginia Community College System to redesign developmental educational programming for English (reading and writing) and mathematics at all of the 23 community colleges in the state. While noteworthy in its dynamic goals and accomplishments, the redesign activities and timeline created a moving target for institutionalizing ACE. Ultimately, lessons learned in ACE helped improve the VCCS developmental education redesign and implementation at PVCC.

Organization Type: Public College or University
 Institution Type: 2-Year
 Special Designation: Community College

SUBJECTS:

o o o Access, Retention, and Completion

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- ◦ ◦ Adult Education
- ◦ Quantitative Reasoning
- ◦ Writing

Subject Key:

- ◦ ◦ Highly relevant
- ◦ Relevant
- Slightly relevant